SPEAK UP AND BE HEARD:

Steps to Effective Advocacy

Child and Youth Officer
for British Columbia

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The Child and Youth Officer for British Columbia

Children and youth have the right to be involved in making decisions that affect them. The Child and Youth Officer for B.C. promotes *meaningful participation* of children, youth and families in decision-making, and provides advocacy support for children, youth and other individuals who are having trouble getting a service they need or who disagree with a decision that has been made.

If you contact the Child and Youth Officer, a member of the Child and Youth Officer's team will do one or more of the following things:

- support self-advocacy by providing information about rights, policies, relevant government services and available complaints processes
- provide advice and coaching on effective self-advocacy
- send out relevant written materials
- connect individuals with natural or community advocates for ongoing support
- assist in finding a local advocate or support person
- in some situations, directly advocate on behalf of a child or youth to ensure that his or her views and interests are heard and considered in decision-making.

Calls from children and youth are a priority and will be responded to immediately.

Meaningful participation

Meaningful participation is about bringing children, youth and their families into the process of making decisions that affect their lives. Participation in decisions affecting children and youth is identified in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child as a basic right – the right to express their views, to be heard and to have those views taken into account in accordance with their age and maturity. Bringing families into decision-making is an acknowledgement of their responsibility for the child and allows for decisions that reflect that children and youth are not isolated beings, but need to be understood in the context of their family.

Participation is enhanced when children, youth and families receive relevant information, are well prepared, can express their views, have advocacy support if needed, feel comfortable and welcomed into the process, and are treated with respect. Meaningful participation can lead to better decisions being made and services and planning being more successfully implemented, because the decisions are jointly made and understood.

PART 1

INTRODUCTION

How to Use This Guide

Speak Up and Be Heard: Steps to Effective Advocacy was produced by the Child and Youth Officer for British Columbia. The Child and Youth Officer's mandate is to:

- support children, youth and families in accessing relevant government services
- independently observe those services, and
- advise government about how to improve them.

As part of our mandate, we support:

- self-advocacy (people advocating for themselves)
- advocacy on behalf of individuals by others in the community, and
- openness to meaningful participation and advocacy among service providers.

Speak Up and Be Heard: Steps to Effective Advocacy is intended to help people who have to advocate for themselves or for another person, particularly in the area of services for children and youth. It suggests ways in which you can gain some power and control over your own life, by participating in and influencing decisions that affect you.

Here's what you will find in *Speak Up and Be Heard: Steps to Effective Advocacy*:

- Part 1 defines and describes advocacy. It also contains a glossary (page 9), which defines key words in this guide. Words that are in **boldface** the first time they appear in the guide are defined in the glossary.
- Part 2 takes you through the steps involved in advocacy, from preparing to advocate, to presenting your case and persuading the decision-makers, to following up and moving forward. Each of these sections includes a brief plain-language summary.
- Part 3 provides some advocacy tools, including a code of ethics for advocates, a record of conversation, an outline for a letter, and a list of useful contacts and resources.

Every situation is unique. The suggestions in this guide are based on approaches that have been used in all kinds of situations. So use what works for you, and ignore the rest.

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Advocacy isn't always easy...

Sometimes people feel frustrated, discouraged or angry, but they don't speak out, because they:

- feel they don't have enough time, energy or information to take action
- believe nothing they say or do will make a difference, or that no one will listen
- are afraid of speaking out to someone who has the power to affect their finances, make life difficult for them or their family, or affect the quality of the services they receive
- are afraid of not being believed, of looking stupid, of being put down, or of getting too mad, sad or out of control
- don't feel smart enough, educated enough, or competent enough
- don't understand what is being said, because they have difficulties with language or reading, or because others are using jargon or technical language
- feel intimidated by people in authority
- don't want to make trouble for anyone else, or they
- don't want to go through what they went through the last time they spoke out.

...but it's worth it!

There is no guarantee that just because you speak out, you will get what you want. However, if you don't speak out, nothing will change. Here are some reasons to speak out for yourself or for another person:

- The only way that others will know that you disagree with a decision, or that your rights have been violated, is if you speak out.
- If people who have the authority to make decisions that affect you don't know that there are problems, they will assume that everything is all right.
- Everyone should be able to challenge the "rules" they are required to live by; just because something is a law or policy doesn't mean that it is fair or just.
- If you stand up for yourself, you will have the satisfaction of knowing that you tried to take care of yourself, even if you don't achieve your goal in the end. Similarly, if you are advocating for someone else, both you and that person will know that you tried. Speaking out helps people keep their self-respect and dignity.
- People who speak out often find that they are not alone; by refusing to be silent, you may lead the way to changes that affect a lot of other people.

—Adapted from *The AdvoKit: A Step-by-Step Guide to Effective Advocacy*

What Is Advocacy?

Everyone should be able to say what they want and need when decisions that will affect their lives are being made. But sometimes people have difficulty being heard by the people making those decisions, in an agency, a government office or department, or a "system." They may feel that the people in the system don't hear them or don't understand their situation, and that they have no say in decisions that have a major impact on their lives.

Advocacy is about making your views heard, or acting on another's behalf to make his or her views heard, by people making decisions that affect you or the other person.

There are several kinds of advocates. This guide is aimed at two kinds of advocates:

- those who speak or act on their own behalf (or **self-advocates***), and
- those who speak or act on behalf of others (also known as **natural advocates** or **individual advocates**).

Advocacy is an **assertive** and **collaborative** approach to problem-solving – rather than an aggressive and adversarial one. Being assertive simply means knowing what you want and how to ask for it, and standing up for yourself while respecting the needs of others. (The differences between assertive and aggressive are described in more detail in the section on "Persuading" in Part 2.)

In addition, advocacy is an approach based on understanding **interests** – yours and others' – rather than on taking **positions**. And whether you are advocating for yourself or for another person or group, advocacy means understanding other people's interests and working collaboratively to come up with solutions. (You can find more on interests and positions in the section on "Persuading" in Part 2.)

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* Words that are in **boldface** the first time they appear in the guide are defined in the glossary on page 9.

Do You Need Advocacy Support?

Advocacy situations can be quite complex. If, as you read this guide, advocating for yourself begins to seem like an overwhelming task, don't be afraid to ask for help, advice or information, whether from family and friends or from other individuals and groups in the community. You can still use this guide, along with the person helping you, throughout the advocacy process. If you feel you need an advocate to speak on your behalf, the guide will help you know what to look for in an advocate.

Advocating for another person

Everything in this guide applies equally to situations where you are advocating on your own behalf, and those where you are advocating on behalf of another person. But when you are advocating on behalf of another person, there are some extra things to keep in mind, including:

- Make sure you have the person's consent before you speak or act on his or her behalf.
- Encourage the person for whom you are advocating to advocate for him- or herself as much as possible; don't just take over. Support the person's efforts.
- Make sure your values and beliefs don't interfere with the person's right to make his or her own choices. You may not necessarily agree with those choices, or with what the person says; your role is simply to ensure that his or her voice is heard and considered. Be honest about what is realistic; while it's important to work towards creative solutions, it's also important not to create unrealistic expectations.

In addition, when you are advocating on behalf of a child or youth:

- Keep the process child-centred. The child's or youth's best interests are always key.
- Always look for appropriate ways to include the child or youth. Keep asking yourself: What is the best way for the child or youth to actually participate in the decision-making process?
- Remember that your role is to ensure that the child's or youth's views are heard and considered.

For a more detailed list of things to keep in mind when you are advocating on behalf of another person, see the "Code of Ethics for Advocates" on page 31.

Advocacy aids and barriers

In order to be an effective advocate, you need to be well prepared. You have to gather all of the relevant information, and be able to present your case in a clear and organized way.

Listening and communicating are skills that will help you in both preparing and presenting your case. Helpful attitudes include being cooperative, flexible, patient, persistent, resourceful and positive.

There are a number of barriers to effective advocacy. These include:

- being unprepared
- fearing **retaliation** (someone getting back at you for speaking up)
- feeling inferior to others
- being unaware of what you are entitled to
- expecting too much
- being unwilling to listen to other people or to explore alternative solutions.

Part 2 of this guide is intended to help you be an effective advocate by making the best use of your skills and avoiding barriers.

The Four Parts of Advocacy

Effective advocacy can only happen in a climate of mutual respect. This means that we need to act respectfully in all of our relationships with participants in the advocacy process. People can tell if we genuinely value their experiences, expertise and perspectives or if we are simply "going through the motions."

Within this climate of respect, an effective advocacy process builds on four key elements:

1. Rights

- Protection and survival – Children have the right to life and the right to be protected from all abuse, violence, exploitation and neglect.
- Participation – Children are fully persons with the right to express their views and participate in decision-making concerning them.
- Development – Children are entitled to grow to adulthood in a nurturing family and community environment, with an adequate standard of living to support their full development.
- Non-discrimination – All children are entitled to respect and the protection and benefit of their fundamental human rights regardless of their race, ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age, disability, or other characteristics.

Rights are not earned; they are owned.

2. Information

Information is power. Power is not evenly shared. Those within the system have information and are empowered. Those outside are not.

Having adequate information is a basic requirement of becoming an active participant in the system.

3. Voice

With information, support and resources, people are their own best advocates.

To really have a voice, people need the opportunity to say it "their way" to someone who really listens and can do something about it.

The voice of children, youth and their families is valuable; it is not a problem.

4. Inclusion

When everyone who "cares" or "should care" has a voice, better decisions will be made.

Inclusion is not just about inviting people to the table – it is about genuinely welcoming and considering their point of view, regardless of their "title" or "status."

To even the playing field, equal respect must be given to all perspectives.

—Adapted from resources developed by the Office of the Child, Youth and Family Advocate

Two Case Examples

Here are two fictional examples of advocacy situations. In the first example, Jeff gets advocacy support; in the second example, Sandra advocates on her own behalf (self-advocacy). You might find it helpful to refer to these examples as you consider your own situation.

Jeff

Jeff is 17 years old and has been living away from home for over a year. His parents are separated. His mother is on Income Assistance and has two younger children at home, in a different part of B.C. He doesn't know exactly where his father is, but he is an alcoholic and has been extremely abusive in the past. Jeff doesn't feel that going home is an option. He has been living with a friend's family, but they can no longer support him; he has to be out by the end of the month, and has nowhere to go. Jeff is trying to finish Grade 12 at an alternative school, and is working part-time. But it's not enough to pay for his own place, and he's already worried about keeping up at school.

Someone tells Jeff that he should go to the Ministry of Children and Family Development for help. He calls and talks to a social worker, who tells him they can't help and that he'll have to move home. Jeff doesn't know where else to turn. He feels hopeless, and begins to have suicidal thoughts.

Taylor, a youth worker at a local youth drop-in centre where Jeff sometimes goes, notices the change in him, and asks what's going on. They sit down over coffee, and Jeff explains the situation. Taylor helps him to clearly identify the problem and the facts of the situation. He suggests that Jeff meet with the social worker in person, rather than talking on the phone, and agrees to accompany Jeff to the meeting. Taylor then gathers information for Jeff about what programs and services are available, including Youth Agreements for young people who cannot return home and require support. Taylor also spends some time with Jeff coaching him on how to say what he needs to say. They agree that when they meet with the social worker, Jeff will do most of the talking; Taylor will only be there to support Jeff, and to fill in the gaps as needed.

At the ministry office, Jeff describes the situation, and asks again for financial assistance, and specifically for a Youth Agreement, which he thinks could work well for him. He explains that he is afraid he would not be safe with his parents, and that he really wants to finish high school, so he can't work more than he already is. The social worker says that Jeff really needs to work things out with his family. The ministry's policy is that Youth Agreements are only for people who are drug-addicted or street-involved, or who have mental health issues. Jeff becomes very angry, and slams his fist on the table; Taylor suggests they take a break.

After the break, Taylor tells the social worker about Jeff's feelings of hopelessness, and the comments he has made that reflect his suicidal feelings. On hearing this,

the social worker agrees to do a further assessment, which would include speaking to Jeff's parents. In the meantime, she will connect Jeff with a mental health worker in the community and make arrangements for Jeff to stay at a new safe house for youth until they get things sorted out. Another meeting is set for the following week, when the social worker will have more information.

Sandra

Sandra is an Aboriginal single mom whose two children were removed from her care six months ago. The children now live in a foster home, and Sandra sees them once a week for two hours at the local friendship centre. The visits are supervised by agency staff.

Sandra has been attending the drug and alcohol counselling sessions and the parenting program requested by the social worker. She is no longer involved with her abusive partner. Sandra feels that because she is doing so well, she should be able to have unsupervised visits with her children. The children have been asking to go to their home and see their bedrooms and toys. Sandra feels very uncomfortable during the supervised visits, and wants to be able to interact with her kids in their own home. Sandra has given the social worker all this information, but he refuses to grant her request, without giving her any reasons.

Sandra calls the social worker's supervisor, explains the situation, and requests a meeting to discuss the plans for the children. She also asks to have the foster parents attend, because she has never met them. The supervisor agrees. Sandra asks her alcohol and drug counsellor to attend the meeting; she knows this will be very emotional for her and that she will need the support. She also asks the parenting program instructor to attend. (She lets the supervisor know that they will be attending.)

To prepare for the meeting, Sandra writes down all of the dates of the sessions and classes she has attended, and asks the counsellor and instructor to describe in writing the progress she has made. Sandra recalls that her social worker once told her that the Ministry of Children and Family Development wants families to be together wherever possible, and that maintaining contact between children and parents is very important. With the counsellor's help, she finds out more about the ministry's practice standards for children in government care. She then makes a list of the questions she wants to ask, and some suggestions for possible solutions.

At the meeting, Sandra explains what she wants and why she wants them. She then listens to the social worker's explanation of why he has not granted Sandra's request: he feels that not enough time has gone by and that Sandra hasn't made enough progress. He has heard that Sandra is still connected to her abusive partner. Also, the friendship centre staff person who supervises Sandra's visits with the children has reported that Sandra makes promises to the children that she can't keep, and that this is upsetting the children. Sandra provides the social worker with her information, which includes the dates she has attended counselling and parenting sessions, the progress reports from the counsellor and instructor, the last date

that she saw the abusive partner, and the ministry's policies.

On the basis of the information Sandra provides, the social worker and his supervisor agree that Sandra has made enough progress to justify some changes. The social worker acknowledges Sandra's desire to spend time with the children in a more comfortable setting. However, he and the supervisor don't think that fully unsupervised visits are appropriate yet.

Having taken the time to really listen to each other's interests, they are able to come up with a solution that everyone is comfortable with: it is agreed that Sandra can have visits with the children at home, supervised by someone who knows them. Sandra suggests her aunt, and the social worker agrees to explore this possibility.

They also discuss Sandra's need to know exactly what is expected of her in order to regain custody of her children. The social worker agrees to get back to Sandra by the end of the week to discuss an upcoming visit in the home. Another meeting is set for three weeks later to review how things are going.

Although she did not get exactly what she wanted, Sandra leaves the meeting satisfied that progress has been made and that she has been heard.

Glossary

Note: The words defined here are those that are in **boldface** the first time they appear in this guide. The definitions are not as complete as they would be in a dictionary; they apply only to the way the word is used in this guide.

advocacy: making your views, or the views of another person, heard by people making decisions that affect you or the other person; active support, especially of a cause; an assertive and collaborative approach to problem-solving.

advocate: (noun) a person who speaks or acts on behalf of another person, or on his or her own behalf; (verb) to speak or act on behalf of another person, or on your own behalf.

aggressive: hostile, forceful; attacking someone verbally or physically; not respecting the needs and rights of others.

assertive: forthright, positive and direct in dealing with others; respecting the needs and interests of others.

civil rights: things we are entitled to as citizens, specified in Canada in the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

collaborative: requires that people work together cooperatively on something.

discrimination: different and/or unfair treatment of a person or group based on characteristics such as race, colour, ancestry, place of origin, political belief, religion, marital status, physical or mental disability, sex, age, or sexual orientation.

entitlement: something to which a person is entitled under an international agreement, or a law, regulation or policy.

interest: *why* someone wants something, as opposed to *what* he or she wants.

human rights: things we are entitled to just because we are human, addressed in international agreements.

legislation: a law or an act passed by a legislature, defining individual rights and entitlements.

natural advocate or individual advocate: a person who speaks or acts on behalf of others.

passive: not participating actively; offering no opposition; acted upon rather than acting.

policy: instructions for applying a law and regulations, passed by a government; more detailed than regulations.

position: *what* someone wants, as opposed to *why* he or she wants it.

regulation: instructions spelling out how a law is to be applied, passed by a government.

retaliation: getting back at someone for something he or she did, such as filing a complaint, by withholding services, holding back funds, etc.

right: something to which a person is entitled under an international agreement, or a law, regulation or policy.

self-advocate: a person who speaks or acts on his or her own behalf.

Keeping Records: An Essential Advocacy Tool

Keeping records, or documentation, is an important advocacy tool, and essential at every stage of the advocacy process. It will help you keep track of what has happened and what you've done, which in turn will help you decide what to do next. Good records will help you make a stronger case.

Keep a record of everything – telephone calls, e-mails and letters (both to and from you), and meetings.

When documenting, answer the "W5" questions: who? what? when? where? why? For example, when you talk to someone on the telephone, write down:

- the name of the person and his or her contact information
- the date and time of the call
- what you requested, and the answer you received
- any explanations given
- what you agreed about, and what you disagreed about
- what actions you and/or he or she said would be taken and when
- how you will know they have been taken
- whether you need to call back to follow up.

(A record of conversation form is included on page 32.)

It's useful to keep everything in a file folder, large envelope, box or binder, in chronological order (i.e., in the order of their dates). Print off every e-mail, document each telephone conversation, keep every letter or other correspondence, and take notes at meetings – and keep them in order in your file. Bring the file to all meetings, or have it in front of you during telephone calls, so that you can easily refer to your records.

If someone asks you for copies of your records, and you want to provide them, make photocopies for that person (or ask him or her to make them), and keep the originals.

PART 2

HOW TO ADVOCATE

Preparing

Planning and preparation are essential to effective advocacy. Planning and preparation include:

- assessing the situation – clearly identifying the problem and possible solutions to the problem
- gathering all the facts about the situation
- looking for other ways to resolve the problem, and
- making an action plan.

Every advocacy situation is different, so some of the suggestions in this section may not apply. Or you might want to use them in a different order than they appear.

TIP: Tell your story

You will probably be asked to describe your situation or tell your story many times. You will need to be patient. It will be helpful to find a way to describe the situation or tell the story as briefly, clearly and consistently as possible.

To be clear about the details, ask yourself the following questions, and write down the answers:

- What has happened?
- When did it happen?

If you are questioning a decision that has been made, also ask:

- Whom have you spoken to about what happened, or about the decision?
- What did you ask for?
- What reasons did the person/people provide for not giving you what you asked for?
- Was the refusal based on a particular law or policy? If so, what was it? (Be exact.)
- Why do you think the refusal was wrong?
- What do you think will happen if you don't get what you have asked for?

Write everything down. This will help you to remember all of the relevant points, and help you to be consistent if you have to repeat your story a number of times.

Then try to summarize everything in three or four sentences.

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Rights and Entitlements

Right is another word for what we are *entitled* to.

We are entitled to certain things just because we are human. These are known as **human rights**. For example, we are all entitled to be free from **discrimination** based on race, colour, ancestry, place of origin, political belief, religion, marital status, physical or mental disability, sex, age, or sexual orientation. Human rights are addressed in international agreements such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and are confirmed in Canadian and British Columbian laws.

Civil rights are what we are entitled to as citizens. In Canada, these are specified in the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. For example, under the Charter, everyone is entitled not to be unreasonably searched, or arbitrarily arrested or imprisoned; and someone who is arrested is entitled to be informed promptly of the reason for the arrest, to contact a lawyer, and to have a judge decide whether the detainment was legal.

Children and youth also have human and civil rights, which are specified in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which Canada is a signatory and which British Columbia has endorsed. (In B.C., children and youth have additional rights under a variety of acts, including the *Mental Health Act*, the *Infants Act*, and the federal *Youth Criminal Justice Act*. Children and youth in government care have additional rights, specified in Section 70 of the *Child, Family and Community Service Act*.)

Beyond these very broad declarations of human and civil rights, our legislatures define individual rights and **entitlements** in the laws (also known as **legislation** or acts) they pass. Governments pass **regulations** spelling out how an act is to be applied, and develop **policies** that provide even more detailed instructions for administering acts and regulations. Policies are usually not legally binding, and can be challenged. You or the person for whom you are advocating may have rights and entitlements under specific legislation, regulations and/or policies, and it is important for you to know exactly what these are.

In addition to rights, there are reasonable expectations of how a person should be treated. When advocating on your own behalf or on behalf of another person, you can expect:

- to be treated with fairness, courtesy and respect
- to be safe from physical and verbal abuse
- to be able to ask for what you need
- to be listened to
- confidentiality in most situations.

When exercising or advocating for our rights and entitlements, it is also very important to remember to responsibly balance our own rights and entitlements with those of others. For example, just as you are entitled to be treated with fairness, courtesy and respect, so are the people you talk to or deal with while advocating.

1. Assess the situation

The first step in trying to solve a problem is to clearly identify and define what the problem is.

So take a step back and ask yourself:

- What happened? (Perhaps you have been denied something that you feel you are entitled to, your voice has not been heard, you've been discriminated against, or you have not been treated with dignity and respect.)
- Have I had similar difficulties in the past? If yes, are these past experiences connected to or relevant to the present situation?

Once you have defined the problem, you can begin to develop possible solutions. Ask yourself:

- How do I want this situation to be resolved? What am I asking for? (For example, do you want an apology? Do you want an exception to a rule or policy, or do you want the rule or policy changed so that this situation never happens again – to you or anyone else?)
- What have I done so far to resolve the situation? (For example, have you asked the person who made the decision to change his or her mind, based on new information? Have you told anyone else that you are unhappy with the decision? Have you spoken to a supervisor or manager?)
- What will happen if the situation isn't resolved in the way that I want it to be? What are my needs, fears, concerns and hopes?

TIP: Ask for it in writing

If you want to know the reason(s) for a decision that has been made, ask for it in writing. Ask the person to include the specific section of the law, regulation or policy that applies (using exact titles, section numbers, and so on). A common complaint people have is that they weren't given a clear reason for a decision. Asking to have it written down can often help make the person responsible be more clear. A written answer will also be an important part of your records.

TIP: Pay attention to the words

If the words *must, will* or *shall* are used in a law, it may be difficult to challenge a decision that has been made. However, if the word *may* is used, there is room for more flexibility, and it may be possible to reach a different decision.

TIP: You are entitled to review your file

You are entitled to review information that the government has about you. You can simply ask directly for information from your file. If you are unable to get the information this way, you can make a formal request for the file itself through the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*. These requests must be made in writing, either by letter or electronically, at www.oipcbc.org.

If you have questions, you can call the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner: from Victoria, call (250) 387-5629; from Vancouver, call (604) 660-2421; and from anywhere else in B.C., call toll-free 1-800-663-7867.

2. Gather facts and information

In order to present a strong case, and to develop an action plan, you will need to gather and organize all the facts and information that you can.

Here are some examples of the kinds of things you could try to find out:

- If you have asked for something to which you believe you are entitled, and you have been denied, what are the exact reasons for that decision?
- Is there a law, regulation or policy that affects your situation? If so, what does it say you are entitled to?
- Who has the authority to make a decision in this matter?
- Is there a complaint, review or appeal process?
- Is there someone who can help you with a complaint, review or appeal process?
- What have others done in situations similar to yours? Did they succeed in getting what they wanted?

You might be able to get all of this information from the program or agency that you are dealing with. If you are having trouble getting the information you need, try calling:

- Enquiry BC
- a legal aid office (the Legal Services Society Call Centre – at 1-866-577-2525 – can direct you to your local legal aid office and legal information and resources, in nine languages)
- the offices of elected officials, such as your local Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) or Member of Parliament (MP)
- community organizations, such as Native Friendship Centres, immigrant-serving agencies, neighbourhood houses, crisis lines, and other service agencies.

If they can't give you the information you need, ask who else might be able to help.

Another way to get started is to look in the Yellow Pages of your local telephone directory under the heading "Community Services." Your local library might also have a list of agencies and organizations in your community that can help you get the information you need. If you live in the Lower Mainland, the *Red Book* provides more than 4,200 listings of service providers (see "Useful Contacts and Resources" on page 34).

If you still need help, you can call the Child and Youth Officer for B.C. (356-0831 in Victoria, toll-free 1-800-476-3933 from elsewhere in B.C.).

Again, don't be afraid to ask for help, advice or information, whether from family and friends or from other individuals and groups in the community. One suggestion or small piece of information might lead you right to what you need.

Enquiry BC

Enquiry BC provides basic information about the provincial government, directs callers to the program or person they need to reach, and can tell callers the level of government responsible for a program or service. Enquiry BC will also transfer long-distance callers toll-free to the person or program they wish to speak to.

To reach Enquiry BC:

- in Victoria, call (250) 387-6121
- in Vancouver, call (604) 660-2421
- elsewhere in B.C., call 1-800-663-7867.

For Telephone Device for the Deaf (TDD) service:

- in Vancouver, call (604) 775-0303
- elsewhere in B.C., call 1-800-661-8773.

3. Look for alternative solutions

Before you can make a case for getting what you want, you may need to show that you have looked for other ways to resolve the situation.

Come up with some options or alternatives. Try to think in broad terms. For example, rather than specifying that you need a taxi to get you to an appointment, think of it in terms of transportation to the appointment.

Ask yourself:

- Is there any way to get what I want or need from another source? (For example, could you get the service you want from another agency or organization?)
- Is there something I could do or use instead of what I am asking for?
- Is there some other approach that would work?

One way to come up with alternatives is to find out what other people in similar situations have done. Even if your situation is complex, it's likely that someone has had a similar experience. (Try asking any of the agencies or organizations that you approach for information whether they know of any other people who have been in your situation.)

Be sure to keep track of everything you do to find alternative solutions. And be specific: write down the agencies or organizations you approach, the names of the people you speak to and when you speak to them, and the results that you get.

TIP: Ask around

If you don't know what's available to you, and you don't know where to go to find out, try any of these:

- the agency or organization that turned down your request
- other service providers or agencies in your community
- family members, friends, neighbours
- directories of community resources
- the phone book
- crisis lines
- advocacy groups
- libraries
- community centres
- churches
- legal aid offices
- offices of elected officials
- the Internet.

4. Develop an action plan

Based on everything you have learned, decide what you need to do to get your concern addressed or resolved.

Develop a plan that answers these questions:

- What specifically am I going to ask for? (For example: will you present a single solution to the problem, or are there two or more options that could work?)
- Whom do I need to talk to? (For example, who has the authority to change a decision that has been made?)
- What is the best way to communicate with that person – in person, by telephone, or in writing?
- If that person is unable to help, what is my next step? (For example, is there a formal complaint, review or appeal process that you can use?)

TIP: Practise

If you are going to be presenting your case in person, or presenting it on the phone, and you aren't used to speaking up for yourself, it can be very helpful to practise what you are going to do and say.

First, identify the situations that you might find difficult – for example, if the person you are talking to:

- blames you for the situation you are in
- wants to know personal details that you feel are irrelevant
- implies that you are lying
- threatens to cut off a benefit
- uses jargon or technical language that you don't understand
- doesn't seem to be listening.

Then decide how you will respond to those situations. Or, if you are required to answer questions that make you uncomfortable, find ways to answer with dignity – without getting angry, defensive or upset.

Finally, try practising your responses to these situations – first in front of a mirror, and then with other people (friends or family members). Ask for suggestions about how to improve your responses.

In Person, by Phone, or in Writing?

There are three ways to approach the key people in resolving your problem: in person, by phone, and in writing. Your particular circumstances, such as your location, might limit your choices. If not, you will need to decide which approach will work best.
Ask yourself:

- Which approach is most likely to be successful?
- Which approach am I most comfortable with?

No matter which approach you choose, remember that there may be more than one way to get what you want. Be creative and flexible, working towards solutions that work for everyone involved.

Are You Ready?

Here is a checklist that will help you decide whether you are ready to move to the next stage of advocacy – persuading the decision-maker.

Some of these items might not apply to your situation. If all of your answers to those that do apply are *yes*, you are ready. If you answer *no* to some of the questions, take a moment to decide how important each one is to you before moving on.

1	I know what happened, when it happened, where it happened, and who was involved, and I can describe the situation in three or four sentences.	yes	no
2	I know the reasons why I didn't get what I asked for.	yes	no
3	I know what I am entitled to according to the law, regulations or policy.	yes	no
4	I have found out whether there is a complaint, review or appeal process.	yes	no
5	I have investigated possible alternative solutions, and have kept a record of what I found.	yes	no
6	I have asked the person who denied my original request to reconsider his or her decision based on the information I have gathered.	yes	no
7	I know how I want this situation resolved, and what my concerns will be if it is not resolved the way I want it to be.	yes	no
8	I have kept notes about everything I have found out and every step I have taken to resolve the situation, including the names of people I have spoken to, the dates I contacted them, and what was said. The notes are organized in a way that will allow me to find any information I need quickly and easily.	yes	no
9	I have planned how I want to present my case – in person, by telephone or by mail.	yes	no
10	I have rehearsed what I am going to say, and how I want to say it.	yes	no

PREPARING:
Summary

Keep a record of everything that happens when you are advocating. Make notes about every telephone call and meeting, and keep every e-mail or letter. Put all of your notes and documents in a folder, envelope, box or binder, in order by date. Have the file in front of you during phone calls and meetings, so you can refer to it if you need to. Keep records through every step of the advocacy process:

- Clearly define the problem: What happened? Have you had similar problems in the past? Once you have defined the problem, you can begin to think of possible solutions: How do you want the problem to be resolved? What are you asking for? What will happen if you don't get what you are asking for?
- Gather and organize all the facts and information that you can. For example, what reasons have you been given for a decision that has been made? Are there any laws, regulations or policies that apply to your situation? Who has the authority to make a decision about your situation? Is there a complaint, review or appeal process?
- Once you have gathered all the facts that you can about your situation, try to think of other ways to solve the problem. Are there other ways to get what you want? Can you get it from a different place? Is there a different approach that might work? (Be sure to keep a record of everything you do and everyone you talk to, so you can show that you've tried to find other ways to solve the problem.)
- Make a plan. Based on everything you have learned, decide what you are going to do to solve the problem. What are you going to ask for? How are you going to ask for it: in person, by phone, or in writing? Whom do you need to talk to? And if that person can't help, what will your next step be?

The checklist on page 18 ("Are you ready?") will help you decide whether you are ready to move on to the next part of advocacy – persuading the person who can make a decision that takes your views into account.

Persuading

You have finished preparing, and you are ready to persuade the decision-maker. This section looks at three ways to present your case – in person, on the phone, and by mail.

First, however, three important points are covered:

- being **assertive** (versus being **aggressive**)
- interests (versus positions), and
- communicating clearly.

Being assertive

Advocacy is an assertive and collaborative approach to solving problems. It's important not to confuse being *assertive* with being *aggressive*.

Assertiveness is a way of thinking and behaving. It is also a skill that you can learn and practise. Being assertive means:

- knowing what is best for you, and knowing how to ask for it
- expressing yourself simply, clearly and directly – in a way that doesn't attack, negate or manipulate anyone else
- striking a balance between being aggressive and being **passive** (not participating actively)
- standing up for yourself, while respecting the needs and interests of others.

Being aggressive means attacking someone verbally or physically. Aggressive behaviour includes:

- verbal put-downs, shouting, name-calling
- using threatening words and gestures
- using a sarcastic tone of voice
- not respecting the needs and interests of others.

TIP: Assertive or aggressive?

You are being assertive when you:

- use a "reasonable" tone of voice
- are brief, clear and consistent
- ask for explanations until you understand what is being said
- listen to what others have to say and repeat it to make sure that you understand – you don't have to agree with them, just accept that they may have a different point of view
- make sure that others understand what you say – they don't have to agree with you, but they should understand your point of view
- provide alternatives (Next time, you could call me after 1:00...)
- express your feelings using "I" statements (I feel angry when you call me in the morning because...) instead of "you" statements (You make me angry because...)
- are conscious of where you are, to ensure that your message is presented at the appropriate time and place.

You are being aggressive when you:

- shout or yell
- don't let others talk
- constantly interrupt
- make no attempt to understand others' points of view
- withdraw from the discussion.

Focusing on interests

In a disagreement or dispute, people often focus on their position – their ideal or preferred solution to the dispute. The parties (people involved in the dispute) will express their position on an issue, debate back and forth about their positions, and, if they can't settle the matter, stop there. When a problem is approached this way, the parties often fail to explore the issue more deeply, miss opportunities for better understanding, and reduce the number of possible solutions.

Effective advocacy focuses on *interests* rather than *positions*. A simple way to understand the difference between interests and positions is that a position is *what* someone wants, whereas an interest is *why* someone wants something.

Positions are stated like this:

- I want...
- I don't want...
- You should...
- Everyone must...
- I need to...
- We have to...

Interests are often more complex, because they are more personal. They involve what is important to a person, including our concerns, beliefs, hopes, fears, assumptions and values.

Here are some examples of positions and interests:

- Position: I don't want to move to another foster home.
- Interests: I'm worried that I will have to change schools, I won't see my friends anymore, and I won't be able to be on my softball team anymore. I'm afraid that I won't be able to see my current foster parents again.

- Position: I want more visits with my child.
- Interests: I miss my child. I need to know that my child is OK. I'm worried that my child will be angry with me for not visiting him, or that he will forget me.

TIP: Focusing on interests

A useful way to begin to focus on your interests is to ask yourself:

- What do I want? (That's your position)
- Why do I want it? What is important to me about this? What will my concerns be if I do not get what I want? (Those are your interests)

Communicating clearly

Effective advocacy requires good communication skills. Whether you are advocating for yourself or for someone else, and no matter how you are going to present your case – in person, by phone, or in writing – being able to make yourself understood, and listening carefully in order to understand what others are saying, will increase your chances of getting what you want.

It is important that you use words that say exactly what you mean. Be specific! For example, if you use words like *often, always, never, usually, sometimes,* and *most of the time,* you will probably be asked to explain what you mean. Instead of using words like this, try to state the exact number of times that something happened: instead of saying, "He never lets me know when our appointment has been cancelled," say "On January 24, February 10, and March 3, he cancelled our appointment without letting me know."

Or if you are complaining about how someone has treated you, using phrases like *was rude to me, doesn't like me,* or is *out to get me* will explain more about how you feel than about what actually happened. So instead of saying, "She always treats me like dirt," say "When I came to the office on January 15, Ms. X didn't say hello, but began talking about the power she had to hold back my cheque if I didn't give her the information she wanted. When I tried to ask for an explanation, she wouldn't listen."

Listen carefully to the other people when they are speaking. Pay close attention to what they are saying. If you don't understand what they are saying, tell them that you don't understand. If they are using jargon or technical terms that you don't understand, ask them to use different words.

TIP: Separate people from problems

One way to control your feelings when dealing with another person, whether in person, by phone, or in writing, is to try to separate the person from the problem. Don't take things personally. And always try to see the situation from the other person's perspective as well as your own.

Advocacy in person

If you are going to present your case in a meeting, first confirm the exact time and physical location of the meeting. (If you are uncomfortable meeting in a government or agency office, you can ask for the meeting to be held in a neutral location, such as a youth centre, friendship centre or neighbourhood house.) If accessibility is an issue for you, find out whether the location is accessible. If you are driving, find out where you can park; if you are using public transit, find out what bus will get you there, and where the nearest bus stop is. Plan to arrive at the meeting not just on time, but with time to spare.

Make sure you know what you want to say before you get there. Make a list, and keep it in front of you. Bring your notes with you, so that you can refer to them if you need to.

If there are documents or identification that you might need to show (for example, a file or client number, Social Insurance Number, birth certificate, immigration papers, photo ID, receipts, or letters from doctors or other professionals), put them all together in a file or envelope.

During the meeting:

- Be polite and courteous.
- Make sure everyone attending understands why they are meeting.
- If there are people at the meeting whom you don't know, or if you don't understand why a certain person is there, ask.
- Clearly state the problem and how you would like to resolve it.
- Stick to the topic at hand. Don't introduce any surprise issues.
- Take notes. If you don't feel comfortable taking notes, bring someone with you who can do it, or use a tape recorder. (If you choose to use a tape recorder, be sure to tell people, and to explain why.) If there are different interpretations later about what was said, you could write up your notes and send copies to everyone who attended.
- If you don't understand what is being said, or what is happening, say so.
- Don't feel pressured to make a decision if you need time to think about it.
- If you are feeling very emotional, say so, and ask for a break.
- If things appear to be going nowhere, say that this is your impression: ask if anything more can be done right now, and if not, suggest that another meeting be scheduled.
- End the meeting by agreeing on a plan of action with deadlines.
- Thank everyone attending for their time and effort.

After the meeting, you might want to send a letter or e-mail thanking everyone again for their time, and confirming any agreements reached in the meeting. Then complete any tasks required of you, and monitor any other actions that were agreed upon to make sure that the problem is being resolved within any schedule that was agreed to. Report on progress and problems.

TIP: Bringing someone to support you

You are entitled to bring someone to the meeting – to translate, be a witness, or simply support you. Decide *in advance* – and make sure that you both understand and agree – what he or she will do at the meeting: speak on your behalf (act as your advocate), participate in the discussion, take notes for you, or say nothing. Also in advance, let the people you are meeting with know that you intend to bring someone with you.

Advocacy by phone

Sometimes a problem can be solved simply by picking up the phone and speaking directly to someone who as the power to make a decision.

In order to make a phone call as effective as possible, know what you want to say before you begin to dial. Make a list, and keep it in front of you. Keep your notes nearby, so you can refer to them if you need to.

Begin the call by asking whether the person can talk about the matter now, or would prefer to set a time for the call. If the person is not there when you call, leave a message about the reason for the call, and asking for him or her to call back. You might want to suggest times that you are available, and ask the person to suggest a time that would be good for him or her. If you say you are going to call back at a specific time, make sure you do. If the person doesn't call you back, or seems to be avoiding you, ask for the name and number of the person's supervisor, and tell him or her about the situation.

During the call:

- Be polite and courteous.
- Take notes.
- If you don't understand something, stop and ask the person to repeat or clarify it.
- If you feel that no one seems prepared to take responsibility, or the process is slowing down, say that you have that impression based on what is being said. Or refer to the records you have kept of other calls to show why you feel this way.
- Confirm anything that has been agreed to, and any deadlines set.
- Thank the person for his or her time and effort.

After the call, write out a complete record of the call based on your notes, while it is still fresh in your mind. Then complete any tasks that you agreed to do, and monitor any other actions that were agreed upon to make sure that the problem is being resolved within any schedule that was agreed to. Report on progress and problems.

TIP: Managing your anger

You should not have to experience verbal abuse, and neither should the person you are talking to. If you direct your negative feelings – like anger or frustration – at the person at the other end of the line, communication will stop. When people feel attacked, they often attack back, and then it becomes much more difficult to solve problems.

If you think you might get upset while talking to someone, try to identify what the triggers might be for those feelings – in other words, what statements or questions could set you off. Then try practising the discussion with someone who can support you. That person might also be able to be with you when you make the phone call.

If you do get angry or frustrated during the call, take a deep breath, and try to calm down. If you can't, explain how you are feeling, and suggest that you take a break and continue the call later.

Advocacy by letter

If you have chosen to present your case in a letter (which you can send by mail, fax or e-mail), here are some basic guidelines:

- Include the date; the name, agency or organization name, and address (including postal code) of the person you are writing to; and your name, address, and a telephone number where you can be reached. Make sure that names are spelled correctly.
- Be brief – the letter should be no more than 2 pages.
- Be courteous, and try to sound optimistic, as though you expect that the difficulty will be resolved.
- Make sure the letter is neat and readable.
- Begin by stating the purpose of your letter.
- Give specific, factual information to make your point, but avoid giving too much detail.
- Focus on the issues that are most important to you.
- Be clear about what you want to have happen and why.
- Ask for a reply to your letter within a certain time period, and say that if you don't receive a reply by that date, you will contact the person again.
- Thank the person for his or her attention to the matter.

Before you send the letter, read a draft out loud, so you can hear what it sounds like. If possible, have someone else read it, and ask for suggestions about how it could be more effective. If you are angry when you write the letter, do not send it until you have calmed down and reread it.

Keep a copy of the letter. If you don't get a reply within the time period you specified, phone to find out whether the letter was received. If it hasn't been received, send another copy right away. If it has been received, ask what action is being taken to resolve the issue.

A sample outline for a letter is included on page 33.

What If...?

What if the person I have to speak with uses a lot of technical terms or jargon and I don't understand what he or she is saying?

If you don't understand what is being said, or if it's not clear to you, ask the person to use other words. You have a responsibility to ask, and he or she has a responsibility to use words you understand.

What if the person I am dealing with makes me feel inferior, or as if he or she is doing me a big favour?

Services wouldn't exist without people to use them. Remember that every person has equal worth and value, no matter what side of a desk he or she is sitting on.

What if I suspect that I am being discriminated against because of my race, colour, ancestry, place of origin, political beliefs, religion, marital status, physical or mental disability, age, sex, or sexual orientation?

You may be able to deal with the matter directly by letting the supervisor or manager know about your concerns. However, you may wish to check with the B.C. Human Rights Tribunal (604-775-2000 in Vancouver, or toll-free 1-888-440-8844 from elsewhere in B.C.) to see whether you should make a formal complaint.

What if I am afraid to ask for what I want because standing up for myself might make the situation worse?

Sometimes people are afraid to ask for what they want, because they think people who have the power to make decisions might become angry and take it out on them or someone close to them. They fear **retaliation**.

It is important for you to know that many complaint processes have built-in protection against retaliation. In other words, you are entitled to make a complaint and face no consequences.

Here are some suggestions about how to deal with fears of retaliation:

- Bring your concerns out in the open.
- Try to begin the discussion about your fear of retaliation in a positive way, as a concern that needs to be addressed – not as an accusation against the person or organization you are talking to.
- Discuss what kinds of behaviours and actions would feel like retaliation to you – for example, unnecessarily holding back a cheque, withholding services, or mistreating a vulnerable family member who is not able to speak out for himself or herself.
- Before you leave, go over what was discussed, so that you know that you and the person you are talking to have the same understanding about what will happen in this situation. Be sure to keep your own notes.
- Thank the person you are talking to for understanding why you needed to bring this matter up.
- Give yourself a pat on the back for having had the courage to talk about a very difficult subject.

(Answer adapted with permission from materials prepared by the B.C. Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils.)

PERSUADING:
Summary

Advocacy is an assertive approach to solving problems. Being assertive is not the same as being aggressive:

- Being assertive means knowing what is best for you and knowing how to ask for it. It means expressing yourself simply, clearly and directly. And it means standing up for yourself while respecting the needs of others.
- Being aggressive means attacking someone with words or physically. It means using threatening words and gestures, or shouting and name-calling. And it means not respecting the needs and rights of others.

Advocacy focuses on interests rather than positions. A position is what someone wants. An interest is why someone wants something. When you are advocating, always try to focus on why you want what you want, what is important to you about it, and what your concerns will be if you don't get what you want.

Good communication skills are very important in advocacy. Whether you are advocating in person, by phone or in writing, your chances of getting what you want will be better if you are able to make yourself understood, and if you understand what others are saying.

In person

- If you are bringing someone to support you, decide in advance what that person will do, and tell the other people in the meeting that you will have someone with you.
- Arrive early.
- Have your file with you, as well as a list of the things you want to say.
- Be polite and courteous.
- Clearly state the problem and how you would like to solve it.
- Take notes (or have your support person take notes for you).
- If you are feeling emotional, ask for a break.
- Don't feel pressured to make a decision if you need time to think about it.
- End the meeting by agreeing on a plan of action, with deadlines.
- Thank everyone for their time.

By phone

- Before you call, make a list of what you want to say.
- Keep your file nearby so you can refer to your notes if you need to.
- Begin the call by asking whether the person can talk about the matter now or would prefer to set a time for the call.
- During the call, be polite and courteous.
- Take notes.
- Confirm anything that has been agreed to, and any deadlines set.
- Thank the person for his or her time.
- After the call, write a complete record of the call, based on your notes.

By letter

- Make sure that your letter is neat and readable.
- Be polite and courteous.
- Be clear about what you want to have happen and why.
- Give enough information to make your point, but don't give too much detail. The letter should be no more than 2 pages long.
- Before you send the letter, read it out loud, so you can hear what it sounds like.
- If you are angry when you write the letter, don't send it until you have calmed down and reread it.
- Keep a copy.

Following up

Whether you have presented your case in person, by phone or by letter, be sure to do whatever tasks you agreed to do. Check in with people to make sure they are doing the things that they agreed to do, according to any schedule that you agreed to. Let them know about any progress made or any problems that occur.

Moving Forward

If you have already achieved what you wanted to, congratulations!

If you have presented your case and are still not satisfied with the outcome, take some time now to think about what to do next. Ask yourself:

- Did I accomplish part of what I set out to do?
- What went well?
- Who was helpful to me?
- What would I do differently if I could do it again?
- What will happen if this resolution stands?
- Can I find any *new* information that could lead to a resolution in my favour?
- Is there someone else who has the authority to resolve things in my favour?
- Do I want to take my case further? Where can I do that?
- Do I have the time and energy to continue?

You will probably know from the research you did in preparing to present your case whether there is a complaint, review or appeal process. If there is, and you want to use it, you will need to find out whether the process has to be started within a certain period of time, and what forms you will need and where to get them. (If the problem involves a government ministry or agency, Enquiry BC can direct you to the information you need.) It would also be a good idea to go back to Step 1 in "Preparing" to assess the situation.

If you have already used the complaint, review or appeal process, you need to find out what, if any, formal steps you can take next. For example, is there a government ministry or department that funds and/or takes complaints about the agency or organization you are dealing with? If you are not satisfied with the way your complaint was handled by a government ministry or department, do you want to contact the Ombudsman? Another option might be to join a support or advocacy group to work for change. There may be a number of ways in which you could continue to pursue what you want. For each of these, take time to consider the advantages and disadvantages.

It's important to remember that at some point you may just have to let the issue go. If you decide not to continue, congratulate yourself for what you did achieve, and for the skills that you gained along the way – you will be well prepared for the next time that you need to advocate.

Whether you are or are not satisfied with the outcome of your advocacy efforts, be sure to thank anyone who has helped you or worked hard on your behalf; let them know that you appreciate their efforts. These people might continue to be helpful in this situation or in other situations that arise, and you are building relationships for the future.

The Ombudsman

The Ombudsman takes complaints about a wide range of public organizations in B.C., and may investigate to find out whether an organization is being fair to the people it serves. To contact the Ombudsman, from Victoria call (250) 387-5855, and from elsewhere in B.C. call 1-800-567-3247.

MOVING FORWARD:
Summary

If you have achieved what you wanted to, congratulations!

If you have presented your case and are still not satisfied, take some time to think about what to do next. What will happen if the resolution that was reached stands? Do you want to take your case further? How can you do that? Is there a complaint, review or appeal process that you haven't yet used? Is it possible that you can find any new information that could change the situation?

There may be a number of ways to continue to pursue what you want. For example, if you have already used a complaint, review or appeal process, there may be other formal steps you can take. Or, if you are not satisfied with the way your complaint or appeal was handled by a government ministry or department, you can contact the Ombudsman (see page 29). You could also join a support group or advocacy group to work for change. In any case, if you want to continue, go back to the Step 1 in the section on "Preparing" in this guide to assess the situation.

It's important to remember that at some point, you might just have to let the issue go. Be sure to thank anyone who has helped you. And congratulate yourself for what you did achieve. You will be well prepared for the next time you need to advocate!

PART 3

TOOLS

Code of Ethics for Advocates

1. Advocates encourage and support others to advocate for themselves as much as possible.
2. Advocates make sure they are aware of advocacy resources, before they start to help others.
3. Advocates obtain consent *before* they speak or act on someone's behalf.
4. Advocates make sure their own values and belief systems do not interfere with the right of individuals to make their own choices.
5. Advocates place the interests, preferences and decisions of the individual above their own when acting on someone's behalf.
6. Advocates avoid any false, misleading or unfair statements or claims about the advocacy process, and their role, skills or qualifications.
7. Advocates advise individuals to be honest.
8. Advocates inform others about the consequences and risks associated with any planned actions.
9. Advocates inform others of their right to confidentiality, their right to give consent prior to release of information, and the legal limitations of confidentiality.
10. Advocates declare any potential conflict of interest in their advocacy activities.
11. Advocates do not behave in ways that could cause fear, discomfort or harm to others.
12. Advocates respect and understand cultural, social and individual diversity.
13. Advocates maintain their skills and knowledge about advocacy issues.
14. Advocates withdraw, in a professional manner, when their involvement is no longer appropriate or useful.

—From *The AdvoKit: A Step-by-Step Guide to Effective Advocacy*

TOOLS

Code of Ethics for Advocates

1. Advocates encourage and support others to advocate for themselves as much as possible.
2. Advocates make sure they are aware of advocacy resources before they start to help others.
3. Advocates obtain consent before they speak or act on someone's behalf.
4. Advocates make sure their own values and belief systems do not interfere with the right of individuals to make their own choices.
5. Advocates place the interests, preferences and decisions of the individual above their own when acting on someone's behalf.
6. Advocates avoid any false, misleading or unfair statements or claims about the advocacy process and their role, skills or qualifications.
7. Advocates advise individuals to be honest.
8. Advocates inform others about the consequences and risks associated with any planned actions.
9. Advocates inform others of their right to confidentiality, their right to give consent prior to release of information, and the legal limitations of confidentiality.
10. Advocates declare any potential conflict of interest in their advocacy activities.
11. Advocates do not behave in ways that could cause fear, discomfort or harm to others.
12. Advocates respect and understand cultural, social and individual diversity.
13. Advocates maintain their skills and knowledge about advocacy issues.
14. Advocates withdraw in a professional manner when their involvement is no longer appropriate or useful.

Record of Conversation

Date: _____

Name and position of person I talked to: _____

_____

Phone number: _____

Issues we discussed: 1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

What I was told: _____

_____

_____

_____

What I said: _____

_____

_____

_____

What we agreed to: _____

_____

_____

_____

Letter Outline

Note: This is intended only to give you a basic idea of how to write a letter. You do not have to use these exact words.

[Date]

[Person's name]
[Title]
[Organization or department]
[Address]

Dear [name],

I am writing to express my concern about [the problem].

[Details about the problem – what has happened to date]

[How you want the problem solved]

Could you please contact me by [date] to let me know whether this is possible.

Thank you for your assistance in resolving this matter.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

[Your name]
[Address]
[Phone number]

Useful Contacts and Resources

Adoptive Families Association of B.C.
Provides province-wide support and advice for people who are beginning to think about adoption, people who have decided to adopt, and those who have already had a child or children join their family.

- (604) 320-7330
- www.bcadoption.com

Advocate for Service Quality, Ministry of Children and Family Development
Helps children and youth with special needs and adults with developmental disabilities and their families get quality services from Community Living BC, ministries, and service agencies in the community.

- (604) 775-1238 (callers from outside the Lower Mainland can call Enquiry BC at 1-800-663-7867 and ask to be transferred to 604-775-1238)
- www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/getting_help/advocate_service_quality.htm

Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies of B.C.
A coalition of over 80 organizations providing multicultural programs and immigrant settlement services throughout B.C.

- (604) 718-2777
- amssa@amssa.org
- www.amssa.org

Autism Society of B.C.
A parent-based and -directed society providing support for individuals with autism and their families in B.C. and Yukon.

- (604) 434-0880 in Vancouver, or toll-free 1-888-437-0880 from elsewhere in B.C.
- www.autismbc.ca

B.C. Association for Community Living
Advocates for children, youth and adults with developmental disabilities and their families, to ensure justice, rights and opportunities in all areas of their lives.

- (604) 875-1119
- info@bcacl.org
- www.bcacl.org

B.C. Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres
The umbrella association for 24 friendship centres throughout B.C., which provide services for Aboriginal communities located in urban areas.

- (250) 388-5522
- www.bcaafc.com

B.C. Federation of Foster Parent Associations
A provincial organization of foster parents, run by foster parents, which aims to bring together foster parents, social workers and other interested people working to improve the standard of care for children in B.C.

- (604) 664-0124 in Vancouver, or toll-free 1-800-663-9999 from elsewhere in B.C.
- bcffpa@istar.ca
- www.bcfosterparents.ca

B.C. Human Rights Tribunal
Responsible for accepting, screening, mediating and adjudicating human rights complaints covered by the B.C. Human Rights Code.

- (604) 775-2000 in Vancouver, or toll-free 1-888-440-8844 from elsewhere in B.C.
- BCHumanRightsTribunal@gov.bc.ca
- www.bchrt.bc.ca

Child and Youth Officer for British Columbia
Supports children, youth and families in accessing relevant government services, independently observes those services, and advises government about how to improve them. Provides a range of advocacy support services.

- (250) 356-0831 in Victoria, or toll-free 1-800-476-3933 from elsewhere in B.C.
- cyo@gov.bc.ca
- www.gov.bc.ca/cyo

Community Living British Columbia
Provides services for individuals and families living with developmental disabilities in their home communities in B.C.

- (604) 660-2522 in Vancouver, or toll-free 1-877-660-2522 from elsewhere in B.C.
- info@communitylivingbc.ca
- www.communitylivingbc.ca

Enquiry BC
Enquiry BC provides basic information about the provincial government, directs callers to the program or person they need to reach, and can tell callers the level of government responsible for a program or service. Enquiry BC will also transfer long-distance callers toll-free to the person or program they wish to speak to.

- (250) 387-6121 in Victoria; (604) 660-2421 in Vancouver; toll-free 1-800-663-7867 from elsewhere in B.C.
  Telephone Device for the Deaf (TDD) service: (604) 775-0303 in Vancouver; 1-800-661-8773 from elsewhere in B.C.

Family Support Institute
A province-wide organization whose purpose is to strengthen and support families faced with the extraordinary circumstances that come with having a family member who has a disability.

- (604) 875-1119 in Vancouver, or toll-free 1-800-441-5403 from elsewhere in B.C.
- fsi@bcacl.org
- www.familysupportbc.com

Federation of Aboriginal Foster Parents
Represents foster parents providing quality care for Aboriginal children in a nurturing, culturally appropriate environment.

- (604) 291-7091
- info@fafp.ca
- www.fafp.ca

Federation of B.C. Youth in Care Networks
A provincial organization dedicated to the promotion and development of local groups run by and for youth in and from government care.

- (604) 527-7762 in Vancouver, or toll-free 1-800-565-8055 from elsewhere in B.C.
- info@fbcyicn.ca
- www.fbcyicn.ca

Knowledgeable Aboriginal Youth Association
Provides strategies, training and opportunities for urban Aboriginal youth to become informed advocates in their community.

- (604) 254-5513
- kaya_advocates@shaw.ca

Legal Services Society – Call Centre
Can direct you to your local legal aid office and legal information and resources, in nine languages.

- (604) 408-2172 in Vancouver, or toll-free 1-866-577-2525 from elsewhere in B.C.

Ministry of Children and Family Development
For information about the Ministry of Children and Family Development's formal complaint process contact:

- (250) 387-7027 (callers from outside Victoria can call Enquiry BC at 1-800-663-7867 and ask to be transferred to 250-387-7027)
- www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/complaints

Native Courtworker and Counselling Association of B.C.
Provides assistance for Aboriginal people, particularly those who are in conflict with the law.

- (604) 985-5355
- nccabc@nccabc.net
- www.nccabc.ca

Office of the Freedom of Information and Privacy Commissioner
Monitors and enforces *B.C.'s Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act and Personal Information Act*.

- (250) 387-5629 (callers from outside of Victoria can call Enquiry BC at 1-800-663-7867 and ask to be transferred to 250-387-5629)
- info@oipc.bc.ca
- www.oipc.bc.ca

Ombudsman
Takes complaints about a wide range of public organizations in B.C., and may investigate to find out whether an organization is being fair to the people it serves.

- (250) 387-5855 in Victoria, or toll-free 1-800-567-3247 from elsewhere in B.C.
- www.ombudsman.bc.ca

Public Guardian and Trustee of B.C.
Operates under provincial law to protect the legal rights and financial interests of children, provide assistance to adults who need support for financial and personal decision-making, and administer the estates of deceased and missing persons where there is no one else able to do so.

- (604) 660-4444 (callers from outside of Vancouver can call Enquiry BC at 1-800-663-7867 and ask to be transferred to 604-660-4444)
- mail@trustee.bc.ca
- www.trustee.bc.ca

Urban Native Youth Association
Provides programs and services for Aboriginal youth, including advocacy support.

- (604) 254-7732
- unyainfo@unya.bc.ca
- www.unya.bc.ca

Resources

A Guide to Aboriginal Organizations and Services in British Columbia
Available electronically and in print from the Aboriginal Directorate, Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation:

- (250) 387-2199
- Aboriginal.Directorate@gov.bc.ca
- www.mcaws.gov.bc.ca/aboriginal_dir

povnet
An extensive Canadian anti-poverty website that includes numerous resources and links. Some resources are specific to advocacy, including a list of anti-poverty advocates in each province and territory.

- www.povnet.org

The Red Book: Directory of Services for the Lower Mainland
Available online and in print, the Red Book lists more than 4,200 agencies offering a variety of services in the Lower Mainland. Listings include non-profit agencies, self-help groups, advocacy groups, and many more. Both the print and online versions are published by Information Services Vancouver, a non-profit agency that provides free, confidential information and referral services. The online version is hosted by the Vancouver Public Library.

- (604) 875-6381
- www2.vpl.vancouver.bc.ca/redbook

Your Contacts

How to Reach Us

By phone

In Victoria call 356-0831
From elsewhere in B.C. call
toll-free 1-800-476-3933

By email

cyo@gov.bc.ca

By fax

Victoria: 250-356-0837
Vancouver: 604-775-3205

By mail

PO Box 9207 Stn Prov Govt
Victoria BC V8W 9J1

At our offices

Vancouver
901–808 West Hastings Street
Victoria
4th Floor, 1019 Wharf Street

www.gov.bc.ca/cyo

This guide is also available on our website, and can be copied as needed.

BRITISH COLUMBIA

CYP# 4500127016